

NAME OF PROJECT: *Italian Canadians as Enemy Aliens: Memories of WWII*

DATE OF INTERVIEW: September 15, 2011

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Thunder Bay, Ontario

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: Rino Albanese

NAME OF INTERVIEWER: John Potestio

NAME OF VIDEOGRAPHER: Maverick Entertainment Group

TRANSCRIBED BY: Lisa Kadey

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PROJECT NOTE:

Please note that all interviews have been transcribed verbatim. The language in this transcript is as it was provided by the transcriptionist noted above. The project staff have not edited this transcript for errors.

ABSTRACT

In his follow-up interview, Rino Albanese discusses his job at Canada Car, where he was constantly bumped from one department to the next. He was laid off from Canada Car, and was then hired by Day Company, which specialized in air pollution in grain elevators. He worked his way up in the company, and did surveys of grain elevators and flour mills across Canada. In his initial interview, Rino had discussed attending Italian classes, which were arbitrarily shut down by the school board. Rino remembers that there were rumours that the RCMP had closed it because of the fascist insignia on the textbooks. Rino's father was a fascist sympathizer, who was sympathetic to Mussolini's ideology, and credited him with putting Italy on the map. Even after the war, his opinion never changed on fascism.

INTERVIEW

RA: Rino Albanese, interviewee

JP: John Potestio, interviewer

ME: Maverick Entertainment, videographer

[Title screen]

[Fades in at 00:00:10]

JP: —with Mr. Rino Albanese in his home at 150 North High (?) Street in Thunder Bay on Se—
September 15, 2011. Rino, as you know, I'm here today to do a follow-up, uh, um, interview.
Uh, people in Toronto suggested that, um, there's a few areas where we need a little bit more
information. So, I've prepared a few questions, I hope you don't mind.

[Fades out at 0:00:34]

JP: Okay, let's, uh, start with the first question then, Rino. Uh, what were your father's and
mother's names?

RA: My father's name? Giovanni. And my mother was, uh, Fortunata (?).

JP: Okay, and then—

RA: But everybody called her Fanny.

JP: And her last name?

RA: Uh, her last name? Uh, Tomaino (?).

JP: Tomaino, okay.

RA: Tomaino.

JP: Tomaino, yes.

RA: Yeah.

JP: And they were both born in Italy?

RA: No, she was born in Port Arthur.

JP: Oh, your mother was born in Port Arthur, okay.

RA: Yeah.

JP: Okay. Uh, and your dad was born in Italy?

RA: My dad was born in, uh, Reggio Calabria.

JP: In Reggio Calabria, okay. Ca—can you tell me when they were born, first your dad and then your mom?

RA: Pardon?

JP: When they were born, first your father and then your mother.

RA: My p—father was born in, uh, 9—uh, 189...4.

JP: And your mother?

RA: And my mother was born in, uh, 1904.

JP: Okay. Now, can you tell us, uh, what your father did for a living? ...What did your father do for a living? What was—

RA: Oh, he was a carpenter, carpenter.

JP: He was a carpenter all his life?

RA: Yeah.

JP: Okay.

RA: Yeah.

JP: A—and your mother was a housewife, I take it?

RA: Housewife, yeah.

JP: Alright. Now, in your interview, in the last interview, uh, you mentioned that you worked, uh, at Canada Car (?), uh, and you wanted to leave after awhile.

RA: Yeah.

JP: Uh, why was that? Why would you want to leave so, so soon? Were you not happy there?

RA: Well, uh, I was happy enough, but I think—I know what happened now.

JP: Okay.

RA: Uh...Cana—Canada Car was very unionized, and you worked in one department, and when they, when they had a slowdown, uh, people got bumped.

JP: Mm-hm.

RA: In other words, somebody in another department had more seniority than me, bumped me. He took my job. [Laughs] And I went to another department.

JP: Okay.

RA: And this went on for half a dozen times, anyway, bumped from one place to another. And I remember the last time I was bumped, uh, I was, I was put in a department. I was the only one in the department before—besides the foreman.

JP: Mm-hm.

RA: And what I was supposed to do was make crates for bus parts, motors and that, to be shipped.

JP: Mm-hm.

RA: Uh, to where—wherever, uh, wherever, uh, that model bus part was, was, uh, was being, uh, used. And...uh, as I say, I got shifted from one department to one department. And I ended up in this, yeah, this, uh...uh, small department, as I say, that, that, uh, shipped small bus parts to different parts of Canada. And [Laughs] I really liked it.

JP: Mm-hm.

RA: 'Cause I was the only one in the department. [Laughs]

JP: Right.

RA: And all I did all day was make little crates, you know. And...then I got bumped from there. And the foreman [Laughs], uh, he was furious. He says, "You're the only guy I've had in years that did any work—"

JP: [Laughs]

RA: "—is because everybody I got, whenever there was a layoff, they knew that this was the last spot, and they didn't give a damn whether they worked or not," you know.

JP: Sure.

RA: [Laughs] Because they're, they're gonna end up on the street anyway. But I liked, I liked that work. So, he apparently—he said he raised hell with the union and the management, but to no avail. They had their rules and their regulations, so out I went. [Laughs] And it was then that I...one of my friends that worked there, uh, of... of the—some of the fellas, uh, in the group

were talking about him. Uh, he got bumped and, and, and, uh, laid off, and he went to work for Day Company (?).

JP: Mm.

RA: Uh, I didn't—I never knew what Day Company was or what, so... I says, well, you know, maybe I should give Day Company a, uh...you know, a, a call. Maybe they're looking for employees. So, I phoned up, uh—I phoned up the, the, the manager, and I told him I recently laid off from Canada Car, and I'm looking for employment. And, uh, uh, he asked me what experience I had.

JP: Sure.

RA: And he says, 'Well, come down for an interview.'" The result of that interview was he hired me. And of course it was altogether different work, it was all, uh, air pollution work for the grain elevators.

JP: Oh, I see.

RA: That's what they specialized in.

JP: Right.

RA: So, uh, I started, I started there, and I worked my way up the—as I, as I... I got more, uh, more skillful in what I was doing, they give me more complicated jobs. Then they were—I was going to different elevators and flour mills across Canada, making surveys for, for, for bidding at

first. Uh, for, uh—we—there was—they're gonna install some, uh, uh, grain, uh, grain, pollution filters at a certain elevator, and, uh, the elevator was going to different—

JP: Sure.

RA: —places for, for prices. So, I was making up the quotes, and some jobs we got, and some jobs we didn't.

JP: Sure.

RA: Northland Machinery (ph) was our, was our big, uh, competitor. We [Coughs] ei—it was either us or them that were getting the contracts.

JP: Right. So, as it turned out, it worked okay for you.

RA: Yeah, I liked that job.

JP: And it worked out okay for you. Well, that's good.

RA: And, uh, before I quit, I got my son started.

JP: Okay.

RA: As a, as a junior dressman (?).

JP: Mm-hm.

RA: And, uh, uh—well, then, then I retired.

JP: Sure.

RA: A few years later. And, uh, and, uh, the company went bankrupt.

JP: [Laughs]

RA: [Laughs] After that. Eh, but my son had enough seniority that—

JP: Sure.

RA: —he got hired by a different company—

JP: A different—

RA: —to look after all the, uh, mechanical, uh, stuff.

JP: Okay.

RA: He's still working for them.

JP: Good. Okay, uh, Rino, if we could go back to another issue that we talked about in the initial interview, that's the, uh, Italian classes.

RA: Oh, yeah.

JP: That you attended. Um, I remember you telling us the first time that, um, the classes were canceled by the school board arbitrarily, they didn't consult, they just canceled the classes.

RA: [Nods]

JP: Uh, you did not seem to recall who the teacher was, is that correct? You don't remember who she—who the teacher was?

RA: No, no, no.

JP: Yeah. But you do remember there were a number of students who attended the class for, for quite—for a while.

RA: Yeah.

JP: Now, I, I also did some interview earlier for another work, and, um, I interviewed a Mrs. Giordetti (?), who also happened to, uh, uh, to attend, to, uh, attend the school that you were at. Do you remember her, Mrs. Giordetti?

RA: Uh, yeah.

JP: Peter Giordetti's (?) wife?

RA: Yeah.

JP: Yes.

RA: Uh, what was her name?

JP: Uh, I, I've forgotten her name, myself, but Mrs. Gior—you know her very well.

RA: Yeah.

JP: Yes.

RA: Oh, yeah.

JP: Now—

RA: She wasn't Italian, she was—

JP: No, no, no, she was not.

RA: —yeah, she was Ukrainian, I think, yeah

JP: But she wanted to learn the language, yes.

RA: But she was very, a very well-liked woman, as far as f—as far as I—

JP: Yes.

RA: —can remember. I didn't, I didn't know Pete that well, but—

JP: Yes.

RA: —uh, I used to meet her and, uh—

JP: Oh, yeah, right.

RA: —she was very popular amongst the—

JP: Sure.

RA: —the various wom—the Italian women, and so—

JP: Right. Now, I remember in—when I interviewed her, she, she did remember the teacher's name, and she mentioned to me, this is quite a few years ago, that the teacher's name was Clara Marguerite (?). Is—

RA: Oh, yeah.

JP: Do you—does that sound ring a bell with you?

RA: No, no.

JP: Is that possible? No, eh?

RA: As I say, I knew a, I knew a, a Margaret, a Margaret. She was a couple years older than, than I was, but we ch—travelled around in a, in a sort of a gang.

[0:10:00.0]

RA: There was Orfeo (?), Margaret, Teddy Maltese (?), and I forget who else. But, uh, uh...

JP: Okay, but the—

RA: I don't know what he actually—actually recall what he did for, for a living.

JP: Okay. That's fine, I just—it struck me as a—that since I just went over the book that I had written about this—or, chapter I had written on this issue, and I remembered the name, so I thought you might recall, but that's, that's fine. Um, do you remember whether you talked about the school being closed arbitrarily by the school board, did you talk amongst yourselves or—

RA: No, there was—

JP: —family.

RA: As I recall, there was, uh, no talk about, no rumors or anything, but I—it just closed.

JP: Just closed.

RA: Just like that.

JP: yeah.

RA: And, uh, I don't know whether I heard from the grapevine or what that, uh, it was, it was closed because the—well, the Mounties closed it.

JP: Right.

RA: Because of the books that we used, uh, the textbooks had the fascist insignia stamped on it, yeah.

JP: [unclear; 0:11:21.5] on it, yes, yeah. Well, I'm glad you say that, because, uh, uh, actually, that's what Mrs. Giordetti also told me—

RA: Uh-huh.

JP: —years ago, that that was basically the reason, that they were worried about fascist propaganda—

RA: Yeah.

JP: —that you might be, uh, sort of ingrained with fascist propaganda.

RA: Yeah.

JP: Does that make sense to you that that's probably the reason why they did it?

RA: Yeah, the Mou—the Mounties, uh, they didn't have a heck of a lot to do, uh, uh, a few outspoken—outspoken people like Papa John (?). They're really harmless people, but—

JP: Right.

RA: —I guess they had to make it look good for themselves. [Laughs]

JP: Yes, yes. That's good [unclear; 0:12:03] then let's get back to some of the activities of that time during the war years. Uh, in, uh, in your interview, you mentioned that your father was a fascist sympathizer.

RA: Yeah.

JP: Uh, can you tell me a little bit more about that? Uh, what—what was he saying, what was he—what was he doing, was he reading fascist literature, anything like that?

RA: Well, uh, I know he used to—I think it was every Saturday morning, there was a, a fascist-sponsored program from New York, and—

JP: On, on radio?

RA: —he used to listen to that avidly.

JP: Oh, yes.

RA: And, uh, oh, he thought the world of Mussolini.

JP: Right.

RA: Uh, you know, because up until that time, uh...Italians weren't looked upon like they are now. They were, they were looked upon as, uh, uh... next to good for nothing, really, in my mind.

JP: Right.

RA: Course, that all changed when the war started. Uh, uh, reading, uh, reading history, I, I read where the Mounties were flabbergasted of—because there were so many Canadians of Italian descent that were joining the active forces.

JP: Mm-hm.

RA: Back—back in the early days of the war, everybody got a call to report for military service. And when you reported, you had a choice of volunteering for overseas service, or not volunteering. Well...the, uh, in Quebec, the, uh, the, uh...the premier of Quebec—what was his name? I can't think of it at the moment.

JP: Was it Duplessis at that time?

RA: But—

JP: Maurice Duplessis, would that have been him?

RA: Yeah, he, he more or less promised the Quebec people that there wouldn't be con—uh, uh, conscription.

JP: Right.

RA: And he pretty well cut—kept his word. So, uh, Quebec had a, a big, big population of, uh, of, uh, men of military age—

JP: Mm-hm.

RA: —that didn't sign up.

JP: Right.

RA: They had a lot that did sign up. Uh, some of the French-Canadian regiments in the army were first class. They were, they were, uh, very aggressive, like, uh, uh, the, uh...uh, uh, like the Van Douces (?).

JP: The Van Douces, yes.

RA: For one regiment, the Maisonneuve, for another, the Chaddieres (?), for another—they were active regiments.

JP: Mm-hm.

RA: And they were making a good name for themselves—

JP: Right.

RA: —overseas.

JP: Okay. So, uh, okay, back to your father, though, he—you say he was sympathetic with what Mussolini was trying to do, with his ideas, his id—ideology? Or what did he like about Mussolini? Your father, I'm talking about.

RA: Oh, oh...he, uh, uh, well, I guess it was kind of hard for him to reconcile the fact that he had two sons—

JP: Right.

RA: —going into the military, and him being a fascist.

JP: Right.

RA: Uh, [unclear; 0:16:03.9]

JP: It must have been hard for him, then, to do. It must have been hard for him, as you say, to reconcile that feeling.

RA: Yeah, oh, yeah. I, I—

JP: Did he ever spoke to you about that? Did he ever have anything to say to you about—

RA: No, no.

JP: No, eh?

RA: He never men—he never, um, he never mentioned it, you know, uh—well, we weren't home that often, you know?

JP: Right.

RA: Once or twice, um, but, uh, but, oh, I guess that he took the attitude, well, uh, I've always had—put my faith in Mussolini, and I'm not going to stop now, sort of thing.

JP: Okay. Do you know what, what drew him to fascism? Was, was it mostly... Mussolini's policies, was it his international reputation? What, what do you think drew him to fascism?

RA: Well, in the early '30s, uh, Mussolini, uh, was, uh, was in the news pretty well all time time.
[Laughs]

JP: Right.

RA: Even the British admired him. [Laughs]

JP: Yes, indeed, yes, they did—

RA: Yeah.

JP: —at first. Even Mackenzie King did.

RA: And, uh, they had delegations visiting them. Hitler, Hitler thought the world of him.

JP: Right.

RA: And, uh, he, he was, you know, he was putting Italy on the map. Before, Italians were nothing.

JP: Right.

RA: Around here, [unclear; 0:17:40]

JP: Right.

RA: They were nothing, but Mussolini was, uh, going about his business. He was sending, uh, squadrons of airplanes over to the Chicago World Fair. [Laughs]

JP: Yes. That's—

RA: That, that was a tremendous propaganda stunt.

JP: That was Ito Lebargo (?), wasn't it? Do you remember Ito Lebargo?

RA: Ito Bo—Babo (?), yeah.

JP: Yeah, yes.

RA: He, he was, uh, in charge of the operation.

JP: Yeah.

RA: I think—

JP: So, your father was kind of proud of these events, then?

RA: Oh, yeah, yeah. Well, they were given a tremendous welcome in the—in Chica—wait, where was it? Chicago.

JP: Mm-hm.

RA: Uh, and, uh... they, uh—he, he was putting Italy on the map.

JP: Right.

RA: Course, when he, uh, invaded Abyssinia, uh, it was a kind of a hard time for us. Well, 'cause we, uh, at the time, we went to the public school. That's, uh, not that school, that's a Catholic school, no.

JP: Right.

RA: But before, uh, before that was built, uh, there was a, a public school there.

JP: Pros—Prospect Avenue (?) School, yes.

RA: And so... when we were, we were Grade, uh, 4—5, 6, my mother sent us to the public school for a few years be—before she sent us to St. Andrew's. And [Clears throat] the kids picked on us during the, uh, uh—Mussolini's venture in—into Abyssinia.

JP: Is that right?

RA: And, uh, because to the English-speaking world, the Italians were, were [Laughs] —they were big bullies, they were this, they were not—they'd forgotten the fact that, that British had been doing this [Laughs] for the last half of the, of the nineteenth cen-century. [Laughs]

JP: That's right.

RA: Taking over.

JP: Empire building, yeah, indeed.

RA: Yeah.

JP: Yeah.

RA: And—but people waving flags, but there was no flags for the Italians. [Laughs] And, uh... uh, so tha—yeah, he would have been talked about, anyway.

JP: Sure.

RA: He'd been talked about.

JP: And, and—

RA: Good or bad.

JP: Yes. And you father sort of caught—was caught up in all this, uh, conflict?

RA: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

JP: So, what—did your father remain a fascist supporter all his life, more or less, even later in his later life, or did he ever change his views?

RA: No, you know, he, he was a fascist su—supporter—

JP: Yeah.

RA: —uh, uh, verbally.

JP: Verbally, yes.

RA: Uh, uh, even when we were in the service, you know. Alright, we went in the service, that's our business. He's sup—he's a supporter of Mussolini, that's his business, sort of thing.

JP: Did he ever talk to you after the collapse of fascism? What did, what did he have to say in those years, after 1944. Did he ever talk to you about that?

RA: Oh, yeah. He, he mentioned that at times, and uh, [clears throat], uh, to him it was a conspiracy by the British, you know. [Laughs]

JP: Yes, yes, yup.

RA: And, uh, uh, uh, Mussolini could do, could do no wrong, you know—

JP: Mm.

RA: —at that time.

JP: Okay. So, he was really an ardent supporter and a convinced, uh, fascist?

RA: No, no, he, he—I mean, uh, I don't know if they ever had any, uh, fas—fascist parades here or anything, but—no, he didn't go—

JP: No.

RA: —around waving flags or anything.

JP: Okay. Well, good. Well, thank you very much. I, I think, uh, that pretty well covers all I needed to cover for today.

RA: Okay.

JP: I appreciate your participation in all this. Thank you, Rino.

[Fades out at 00:21:44.5]

[End of Interview]